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FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8604  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1085  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 000134

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT-ELECT CHRISTOFIAS PROMISES TO REVIVE  
REUNIFICATION EFFORTS

Reference: Nicosia 123

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Greek Cypriots on February 24 elected their first-ever Communist president, AKEL Secretary General Dimitris Christofias. The Soviet-educated Christofias defeated Democratic Rally (DISY)-backed challenger Ioannis Kasoulides by nearly seven points, 53.6 percent to 46.4 percent. In his first statement as Republic of Cyprus President-elect, Christofias pledged to work for the reunification of the island and also for internal political unity. Kasoulides and DISY reciprocated, offering their support for settlement efforts and committing their good offices to improving Cyprus's lately-negative image in Brussels. Christofias owes his second-round win primarily to backing from centrist Democratic Party (DIKO) and Socialist EDEK, both of which will obtain cabinet postings in the new administration. DISY will not participate in Christofias's "government of wide acceptance," but is expected to support the new president's more-engaging (compared to his predecessor's) Cyprus Problem policies. End Summary.

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"Red" Candidate Gets Green Light  
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¶2. (U) Dimitris Christofias, the 61-year-old AKEL leader, was elected February 24 as the sixth president of the Republic of Cyprus. The son of a builder from the village of Dikomo (now in the area under Turkish Cypriot administration), Christofias, educated in the former Soviet Union, defeated right-wing challenger Kasoulides by an impressive six points in a race most experts believed would be closer. It was AKEL's first-ever stand-alone bid for the presidency in its 80-year history.

¶3. (U) Christofias's first speech as president-elect emphasized his desire to revive reunification efforts and restore positive relations with the Turkish Cypriot community. He called on T/C leaders "to work with him for the good of Cyprus and its people," and thanked community leader Mehmet Ali Talat, CTP boss Ferdi Soyer and other Turkish Cypriot political and labor union leaders who had called to congratulate him on his election. At the same time, he extended a hand of friendship to the Greek Cypriot opposition, calling on his supporters to applaud Kasoulides's efforts (an election-night first, to the best of our recollection.) Christofias pledged to represent all Cypriots regardless of their ethnic origin, religion or political affiliation, and "to focus on the things that unite the Greeks, Turks, Maronites, Armenians and Latins of Cyprus."

¶4. (SBU) Kasoulides and DISY leader Nikos Anastassiades publicly and privately congratulated the President-elect and pledged to support his efforts to get the stalled Cyprus process back on track. They also offered to help the new government build alliances in the European Union and restore Cyprus's negative image there, which in the short-term could actually worsen owing to the country's election of a Communist president. Anastassiades also hinted that DISY was considering ending its two-year boycott of the National Council, a

consultative body of all major parties which debates Greek Cypriot Cyprus Problem policy.

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DIKO and EDEK cash in on their votes  
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¶5. (SBU) Christofias's election confirmed once again DIKO's role as political kingmaker in Cyprus. According to various exit polls, the party of incumbent President Tassos Papadopoulos managed to deliver 60 - 70 percent of its voters to Christofias, crushing DISY's hopes that right-wing leaning DIKO voters would disobey official party instructions (Reftel). Some 75 percent of EDEK voters, who ideologically feel closer to AKEL than DISY, obeyed their leaders' instructions to support Christofias.

¶6. (SBU) AKEL's deal with DIKO promised the latter three cabinet seats, including that of foreign minister, as well as Christofias's former post of House Speaker. AKEL spokesman Andros Kyprianou told the Embassy February 22 that the new Foreign Minister will be Cypriot EU Health Commissioner Marcos Kyprianou; he believed that DIKO leader Marios Karoyian would become House Speaker. Media is speculating that the new Minister of Education will also come from DIKO's ranks, with Christofias allegedly attempting to alleviate the Church of Cyprus's fears that an AKEL-led government may change the Greek Orthodox-centric character of education. EDEK was promised two cabinet seats, the Ministry of Defense likely one of them.

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But Not DISY  
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¶7. (SBU) Andros Kyprianou clarified February 24 that the much-trumpeted "government of wide acceptance" would include only the parties that supported Christofias (most analysts had inferred

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that the term referred to a more inclusive cross-section of the political scene, meaning even DISY would get a seat at the table.) Simultaneously, he warned DIKO and EDEK that Christofias "will not be a president under guardianship" -- regardless of those parties' presence in the administration, the new President would be calling the shots. In our earlier meeting with the AKEL spokesman, he discounted rumors that Papadopoulos would exercise a leadership role on the Cyprus Problem, domestic policy, or anything else.

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Comment  
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¶7. (SBU) Christofias's positive words to Kasoulides and DISY, as well as their reciprocal remarks, sent the positive signal that, despite ideological differences, Cyprus's two largest parties realize they must cooperate to spur progress on the Cyprus issue. DISY's possible return to the National Council merits particular mention and bodes well for future settlement efforts, as that body, post-boycott, has favored hard-line policies that resulted in near-zero progress in the last two years.

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